



The Cleveland Museum of Art
Gartner Auditorium

Music by Olivier Messiaen
(born December 10, 1908)

Yvonne Loriod and Olivier Messiaen, piano



Friday, October 13, 1978, at 8:30 p.m.

PROGRAM

Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus (1944)
(Twenty Gazes on the Child Jesus)

XIII. Noël (Carol)

XI. Première communion de la Vierge (First Communion of the Blessed Virgin)

X. Regard de l'Esprit de joie (The Gaze of the Spirit of Joy)

Yvonne Loriod

INTERMISSION

Visions de l'Amen (1943)
(Visions of the Amen)

I. Amen de la Création (Amen of the Creation)

II. Amen des étoiles, de la planète à l'anneau
(Amen of the Stars and of the Ringed Planet)

III. Amen de l'agonie de Jésus (Amen of the Death Agony of Jesus)

IV. Amen du désir (Amen of Desire)

V. Amen des Anges, des Saints, du chant des oiseaux
(Amen of the Angels, Saints, and Birdsong)

VI. Amen du Jugement (Amen of the Judgement)

VII. Amen de la Consommation (Amen of the Consummation)

Yvonne Loriod and Olivier Messiaen

Steinway pianos

The audience is cordially invited to greet the artists at a reception in the North Lobby following the recital.

This concert is made possible by the Gartner and McMyler Funds with the assistance of The Musart Society. It is presented as a part of the Museum's year-long observance of M. Messiaen's seventieth birthday.

The use of cameras and tape recorders at performances in this auditorium is prohibited.

OLIVIER MESSIAEN was born in Avignon in 1908, son of the poetess Cécile Sauvage. He considers his real homeland (and the place where most of his music has been written) to be the Hautes-Alpes of the Dauphiné. He entered the Paris Conservatory at the age of eleven and completed a traditional course of study in all musical areas, including composition (with Paul Dukas). In the following years, he became intensely preoccupied with Hindu and Greek rhythms; various philosophies of time and duration; and, above all, birdsongs. These studies, along with his strong interest in nature and his intense Catholic faith, are the inspiration of his compositions. Messiaen is also renowned as a teacher; most members of the musical "avant-garde" have passed through his composition and analysis classes at the Paris Conservatory. At the age of sixty, he was unanimously elected a member of the Institut de France. His is a unique and personal, but highly influential voice in the world of music.

YVONNE LORIOD was born in Houilles, near Paris. She displayed phenomenal powers of memory at an early age, and by the time she was fourteen, her repertoire included all the Mozart piano concertos and Beethoven sonatas as well as other standard classical and romantic works. Her career as both performer and teacher (professor of piano at the Paris Conservatory) has been of the utmost distinction. Eight of her recordings have been awarded the Grand Prix du Disque. Although her repertoire is extensive, she has become especially identified with the music of her husband, Olivier Messiaen. Most of his piano compositions were written for her and she has given the first performances of all of his works in which a piano is featured as a solo instrument.

PROGRAM NOTES

XIII. Noël

"A carillon. The Christmas bells repeat with us the gentle names of Jesus, Mary, Joseph . . ."

XI. Première communion de la Vierge

For Messiaen this is a tableau in which the Blessed Virgin is represented kneeling, bowed down in the night, a bright halo encircling her womb. Eyes closed, she worships the fruit hidden within her. This takes place between the Annunciation and the Nativity . . . it is the first and greatest of all communions.

"The Theme of God, gentle scrolls, in stalactites, in an inner caress. A reminiscence of the theme of *La Vierge et L'Enfant* of my *Nativité du Seigneur*. A more enthusiastic Magnificat. Special chords and note-values augmenting in pairs, the low pulsations of which represent the heart-beats of the Child in his mother's womb. The dying away of the Theme of God."

X. Regard de l'Esprit de Joie

"A vehement dance, the drunken sound of horns, the rapture of the Holy Spirit . . . the joy of the love of God blissful in the soul of Jesus Christ . . ." Again Messiaen himself supplies both a spiritual and musical analysis of the piece . . . "I have always been struck by the fact that God is happy and that this ineffable and continuous joy dwelt in the soul of Jesus, a joy which transports me, a drunkenness in the maddest sense of the word."

Visions de l'Amen

*Amen, word of Genesis
that is the Apocalypse of the beginning.
Amen, word of the Apocalypse
that is the Genesis of the consummation.
(Ernest Hello)*

Amen has four different meanings:

- *Amen*, so be it, the creative act.
- *Amen*, I submit, I accept. Thy will be done!
- *Amen*, the wish, the desire that this may be, that you would give to me and I to you!
- *Amen*, that is, that all is fixed for ever, consummated in Paradise.

Adding to these the life of creatures who say *Amen* by the very nature of their existence. I have tried to express the varied richness of *Amen* in seven musical visions.

I. Amen de la Création

Amen, so be it! *God said, let there be light: and there was light.* (*Genesis*). The First Piano has a double rhythmic pedal-point in bell sounds and non-invertible rhythms. The Second Piano propounds the theme of Creation, the main theme of the whole work. The whole piece is a crescendo. It begins absolutely pianissimo in the mystery of that primeval nebula which already contains the potential of light. All the bells quiver in this light—light and therefore life.

II. Amen des étoiles, de la planète à l'anneau

A savage and brutal dance. The stars, suns and Saturn, the planet with its multi-coloured ring, rotate violently, God called them, and they said, 'Amen, here we are!' (*Baruch*). The Second Piano exposes the theme of the Planets' dance. This theme begins with five notes which are the substance of the piece. First development: below the poly-modal swirling of the First Piano, the Second alters the rhythm and changes in sudden leaps the compass of the first five notes of the theme. Second development: the opening fragment by elimination, in contrary and forward movement. A third development is superimposed: the First Piano has the fragment as a rhythmic pedal-point; the Second Piano has the fragment with changes of compass. A varied recapitulation of the Planets' Dance follows. All these mixed movements evoke the life of planets and the wonderful rainbow which colours the ring turning around Saturn.

III. Amen de l'agonie de Jésus

Jesus suffers and weeps. *O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* (*St. Matthew*). He accepts, Thy will be done, Amen. The form is that of a Greek Triad: Strophe, Antistrophe, Epode.

Strophe: Jesus is alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, face to face with his death agony. Three musical motifs:

(1) the curse of the Father on the sins of the world which Jesus represents at this moment; (2) a cry! a rhythmic and expressive grouping: "anacrusis—accent—termination"; (3) a heart-rending lament on four notes variously rhythmised.

Antistrophe: the same music as the strophe, but more developed with the addition of low rhythmic pedal-points for the sonority of gongs and tam-tam.

Epode: Recall of the theme of Creation (the sufferings of Christ bring forgiveness and create man anew). A long silence, broken by some pulsations, evokes the suffering of this hour: an unspeakable suffering only slightly expressed by sweat and blood.

IV. Amen du désir

The word Desire must be taken in its highest spiritual sense. It is thus that the angel named the Prophet Daniel: "Man of Desire"! There are two themes of desire. The first, slow, ecstatic and yearning with deep tenderness: already the peaceful perfume of Paradise. The second is much more vehement: here the soul is drawn by a terrible love that attains the paroxysm of thirst. These two sentiments alternate. In the coda, the two principal voices seem to merge into each other, and nothing remains but the harmonious silence of Heaven...

V. Amen des Anges, des Saints, du chant des oiseaux

Song of the purity of the saints: Amen. The exultant vocalise of birds: Amen. *The angels fell before the throne on their faces: Amen* (*Revelation*). First the song of the Angels and Saints: stripped of inessentials and very pure: then a middle section based on birdsong, giving rise to more brilliant keyboard writing.

Some of the best songsters: the songs of the Blackbird, Finch and Blackcap are here stylised, idealised and mingled with the thousand voices of nature in a turbulent yet smiling mixture. Varied recapitulation of the song of Angels and Saints, with a non-reversible rhythmic canon arranged on three planes. A short coda based on the birdsong.

VI. Amen du Jugement

Three notes frozen like the bell of evidence. In verity, I say to you, Amen. *Accursed, get thee hence!* (*St. Matthew*). An intentionally short and harsh piece.

VII. Amen de la Consommation

Consummation, Paradise. The life of the bodies in glory, in a carillon of light, *the shining light that shineth more and more.* (*Prophets*).

The Second Piano takes up the theme of Creation and makes of it a long chorale of glory. The First Piano surrounds the Second (in the very low and very high registers together) with a ceaseless carillon of chords and brilliant, scintillating rhythms, in ever closer rhythmic canons: sapphire, emerald, topaz, jacinth, amethyst, sard, the entire rainbow of precious stones of the Apocalypse that ring, collide with, dance, colour and perfume the light of Life.

— Olivier Messiaen
translation by Felix Aprahamian, 1973